DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 260 027 SP 026 154

AUTHOR Gifford, Bernard R.
TITLE A Modest Proposal: Increasing the Supply of Minority Teachers.
PUB DATE [85]
NOTE 9p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Higher Education; *Individualized Programs; *Minimum Competency Testing; *Minority Group Teachers; Preservice Teacher Education; Standardized Tests; Student Financial Aid; Teacher Placement; *Teacher Recruitment
IDENTIFIERS *California

ABSTRACT

A comprehensive program is proposed to increase the supply and quality of minority group teachers. The first step of the program is the early identification of minority and low-income students who have a commitment to teaching. As early as high school, students expressing an interest in teaching as a career would be selected to participate in a special university, pre-professional teacher preparation program. Subsequent intensive university and post-graduate training for selected students would be financially supported by scholarships and internships. The third recommendation addresses the need for programs and rewards for outstanding teachers once they are in the classroom. This would help ensure the retention of effective teachers. (JD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

A MODEST PROPOSAL:

INCREASING THE SUPPLY OF MINORITY TEACHERS

by

Bernard R. Gifford

Dean, Graduate School of Education

University of California, Berkeley

Prepared for publication in the Sacramento Bee

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

B. Gifford

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED260027

Prospective teachers in California who have not graduated from a state-approved academic waiver program are required to score above a specific minimum cutoff score on the National Teacher Examination (NTE). Since 1983, prospective teachers are also required to take the California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST), which is designed to measure basic skills in mathematics, reading and writing. They must take the test for diagnostic purposes before they can student teach, and must pass it before they can be certified.

As California increased its reliance on both student and teacher testing, the controversy surrounding greater use of standardized examinations has intensified. Criticism comes from a number of quarters. Among those most reluctant to endorse the increased reliance on standardized examinations are groups sensitive to the unique problems confronting prospective teachers from minority backgrounds.

The reluctance of these groups is understandable given the tests' effects on minorities. Of 6,644 minority candidates who took the first CBEST exam in 1983, 3,854, or 58 percert, failed. The highest failure rate was among blacks. Of the 2,040 blacks who took the exam, only 530 were able to proceed with their

SP026154

BEST COPY

plans to be teachers, a paltry 26 percent. For other minority groups the test results were not much better: only 804 out of 2,133, or 39 percent, of Mexican Americans passed, and only 50 percent, or 637 out of 1,259 Asian Americans passed the CBEST exam. In comparison, the passing rate for whites was 76 percent, with 18,856 of the 24,540 whites passing.

The problems associated with these high minority failure rates are made all the more serious by our increasing need for qualified black, Hispanic and Asian American teachers at a time of rapid demographic change. A large and increasing proportion of public school students in California and a number of other states are minority youngsters, and this trend will continue into the next century.

The rates of failure on these examinations reflect two ominous trends: the decline in interest in teaching on the part of many well educated students, especially minority students; and the failure of the colleges and universities to guarantee that their graduates, including many minority graduates, can read with comprehension, write literately and perform routine mathematical computations.

If these trends continue, the supply of minority teachers will nosedive, a result that is as disturbing as it is unacceptable. Equally serious is the prospect that when minority-group pupils, especially those contemplating teaching careers, learn that many prospective minority teachers are judged not good enough to teach, they may lose confidence in their own abilities, reaching the conclusion that the teaching profession is "off-limits" to minorities. Also, minority students, who desperately need to see successful role models, would be denied access, yet again, to exemplars of success.

The first reaction of many to these test results is to cry "racism." They insist that "alternate" certification standards be adopted for minority-group teaching candidates in order better to take into account their different experiences and qualifications. Otherwise, the argument goes, the promises of democracy and equality will once again be placed in deep jeopardy.

I disagree with such a view. We must support minimum competency standards. We must insist that all prospective teachers demonstrate mastery of basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics. This is the least we can do for the State's 4.2 million elementary and high school pupils, 2 million of whom are minorities.

We must also insist that State public officials, in and out of the education establishment, develop, fund, vigorously monitor and evaluate targeted school improvement programs so that minority pupils can become more competitive on examinations such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test of students and the California Basic Educational Skills Test for prospective teachers.

Many have argued that exams like CBEST are class-biased, heavily skewed in favor of pupils from middle class homes. This may well be the case. But the solution to this problem is not to throw out the CBEST exam, although every attempt must be made to rid the exam of its invalid features. Here again, targeted school improvement programs make more sense as a means to close the performance gap between low-income and middle-income students. We must not accept and institutionalize dual standards for minority and non-minority students.

Instead, we must interrupt the cycle of failure. We must take direct action to provide all students in our public schools with quality education that is responsive to their real needs. We cannot begin this effort without well-qualified teachers, including well-qualified minority teachers. To meet the challenge we face, we need to take steps to ensure a larger pool of qualified minority teachers, while also maintaining and improving quality standards.

I propose a three-step, comprehensive program to include: early identification of minority and low-income students who have a commitment to teaching; intensive university and post-graduate training; and programs and rewards for outstanding, effective teachers once they are in the classroom.

Identifying Future Teachers

As early as high school, students who have expressed interest in teaching as a career would be selected to participate in a special university, pre-professional teacher preparation program. Program admission standards would consider potential for growth and an exceptionally strong willingness to learn, in addition to the traditional criteria of grades and past achievements. Special efforts would be made to recruit students with a background or interest in areas of special need, such as mathematics, science or language and literacy. The program would require a five-year university course of study leading to the bachelor's degree and would provide a series of paid school year and summer teaching related internships.

A New Approach to Training Teachers

Students selected to participate in the program would be given a series of diagnostic tests to identify subject area strengths and weaknesses. In conjunction with their regular studies, students would then enroll in a series of tutorials to work on skill development in their weakest areas. These tutorials would be an integrated part of an undergraduate liberal arts program leading to the bachelor's degree. They would cover reading and basic mathematics, with heavy emphasis on reasoning skills and good, clear writing. At the end of two years, the students would be tested to measure their growth. A second individualized study program, again based on skill levels, would then be developed and the process would be intensified in the next three years.

Students completing the program would receive a bachelor's degree. They would then be guaranteed admission to participating California State University or University of California Graduate School of Education programs, where they would be enrolled as regular students. Graduate scholarships covering the full costs of student fees and filing expenses would be provided to all of these students who enter graduate teacher education programs with an undergraduate grade point average of B+ or better. Partial tuition scholarships would be available to high achievement students with a B average. Regular financial aid programs would also be available. Again, as in the first phase of this program, paid internships would be provided to all qualified students for the duration of their post-graduate teacher training studies.

How Do We Pay for These Programs?

We could finance these teacher education scholarships and internships from at least three possible sources. Since all students benefit from better qualified public school teachers, one appropriate source is a small increase in the registration fees that all university students pay. For example, if the University of California raised student fees by only $25 per semester, it could generate over $7 million per year -- enough to support over 900 teacher education students each year. If the State University raised student fees by the same amount, it could generate over $15 million per year, enough for over 2,000 teacher candidates.

The new state lottery passed by the electorate in November is an alternative source. By law, lottery profits are to go to support education. What better use for these monies than to increase the number of qualified teachers in our schools? Finally, the legislature could provide the funds through a direct allocation of funds for this program. Frankly, this approach seems to hold the smallest prospect for implementation.

Teacher Placement and Retention

We must follow up on this effort to increase the pool of qualified minority teachers with an equally vigorous effort to improve the placement and retention of teachers. This means that we must work to end "alternative teacher selection processes," in which teachers with less experience, no advanced degrees and lower salaries are assigned to schools with high proportions of minority and low-income pupils. To put it more bluntly, these alternative efforts have often resulted in pupils with the greatest needs ending up being taught by

inexperienced teachers, themselves in great need of support and guidance from more experienced teachers.

Alternative selection programs have been successful in increasing minority employment opportunities. In too many instances, however, they have also operated as restricted racial conduits, steering newly hired minority teachers, whose qualifications have been earned through alternative means, into almost exclusively minority schools.

Certainly, we need to increase the number of minority teachers. But, we must keep in mind that the effectiveness of our schools cannot be measured simply by statistics on the racial composition of teaching staffs. School effectiveness must be measured by statistics reflecting the mastery of basic skills in reading, writing and arithmetic by all of our students.

Rewarding Outstanding Teachers

My third recommendation addresses the need to identify and reward good teachers after they have been in the classroom for a few years and provide incentives for them to remain in the classroom. I propose a new test that would provide the basis for certifying outstanding individuals as "master teachers." To be taken after at least five years of full-time public school teaching, the test would measure not only subject matter competency in a given field, but also knowledge and application of learning theory, and an ability to implement effective teaching strategies in the classroom and the school.

The test would evaluate a teacher's professional judgment and abilities to diagnose needs of students, match instruction and use of materials to those

needs and to evaluate pupil progress. It would not be solely a pencil and paper exercise; applicants would also be required to demonstrate their instructional skills in a natural setting.

This test would be to teaching what the Certified Public Accountant's examination is to accounting. It would be voluntary and would lead to certification as a master-level teacher -- and, therefore, to new opportunities for professional advancement. As with the CPA-level accountants, these master-level teachers would be compensated accordingly. The test should be available on a nationwide basis, thereby opening up the job market for master-level teachers. Outstanding educators in a "dead-end" position in their own school districts could seek advancement not only outside their districts, but also in another state. Moreover, school districts would be able to allocate teaching talent on a more equitable basis.

A Concluding Note

In conclusion, I want to acknowledge the pain and suffering experienced by those not now armed with the knowledge and skills required to pass present minimum competency examinations. What I have proposed here may bring a transitional period of short-run disappointment for some who will be locked out of teacher training programs or certification. But it will finally put a stop to "victim blaming" measures that have created more problems each time they have been applied. Our children, our teachers and our society deserve better. What education needs now is not more exceptions to standards, but more flexible and imaginative programs to insure that, in more and more cases, the standards themselves can be met.